BRIEFLY

Fall crafts fair taking sign-ups

SIMI VALLEY — The city's Council on Aging will begin accepting applications Monday from people 50 and older interested in reserving vendor space at the council's fall arts and crafts fair.

The fair, which is free and open to the public, will be held Nov. 3-4 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Simi Valley Senior Center, 3900 Avenida Simi.

For more information about applications and the fair, call the senior center at (805) 583-6363.

— Daily News

Harley dealers help fight cancer

MOORPARK — Camarillo and Moorpark Harley-Davidson dealerships are giving away two Schwinn motor scooters to raise funds and awareness to combat breast cancer.

The dealerships will sell tickets through Oct. 28 to raffle off one Schwinn Hope model motor scooter from each location.

Proceeds will benefit Amazon Heart, which supports cancer survivors. Schwinn also donates 10 percent of the purchase price of the motor scooter to the Susan G. Komen Foundation, officials said.

Raffle tickets are $10 each, with 500 tickets available at each store, 1326 Del Norte Road in Camarillo and 6190 Condor Drive in Moorpark. For more information, call (805) 981-9904.

— Daily News

Library to benefit from book sale

SIMI VALLEY — The Friends of the Simi Valley Library group is seeking donations of books, music, videos and recent magazines for its Fall Blowout Book Sale on Nov. 4.

At the sale, fiction, nonfiction, children's books and records will be available for 25 cents each, or $1 a bag. All proceeds will benefit the Simi Valley Library.

The sale will be held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the library's community room at 2969 Tapo Canyon Road.

For more information, call (805) 584-1266.

— Daily News

CSUCI schedules open-house event

CAMARILLO — California State University, Channel Islands, will hold an open house from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday to give the public a chance to explore and learn more about the university.

The event will feature presentations on academic programs, student life, campus history, admissions, financial aid and campus housing.

A free shuttle will provide service to the university from the Camarillo Metrolink Station and the Oxnard Centerpoint Mall. For more information, visit www.csuci.edu.

— Daily News

Immunization clinics scheduled

SIMI VALLEY — Flu and pneumonia immunization clinics will be held Tuesday and Oct. 25 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Simi Valley Senior Center, 3900 Avenida Simi.

The shots are free for seniors who have Medicare Part B coverage or supplemental insurance from Aetna or Secure Horizons. For others, the cost will be $25 for the flu vaccine and $40 for the pneumonia vaccine. For more information, call (805) 583-6363.

— Daily News

Theme sought for annual event

THOUSAND OAKS — The deadline is Oct. 30 to submit theme ideas for the 2007 Conejo Valley Days.

"We will be introducing new attractions and entertainment for 2007, so we're looking for a theme that gives Conejo Valley Days a fresh new feel," said Jean Duffy, general chairwoman for the annual community event, scheduled for May 2-6.

Theme ideas can be submitted by mail to Conejo Valley Days, P.O. Box 4589, Thousand Oaks, CA 91359; by fax at (805) 371-8732 or by e-mail at info@conejovalleydays.com. The contest winner will be announced in November. For more information, call (805) 371-8730.

— Daily News

Labor shortage in paradise a real problem

Hawaii reaching out across Pacific to lure skilled workers to fill jobs

BY KARIN STANTON
Associated Press

KAILUA-KONA, Hawaii — An acute labor shortage on Hawaii's Big Island is prompting employers to reach out across the Pacific to fill job openings.

"It's a multipronged problem," says Mark McGuffie, executive director of the Hawaii Island Economic Development Board. "We've really got some work to do, but we've also got some things that are starting to percolate."

Attracting new industries that offer higher paying, skilled jobs is one priority.

McGuffie notes that since statehood in 1959, the labor market on all of the Hawaiian Islands has been heavily focused on tourism, the military and agriculture.

"Now we are starting to see niche agriculture, and astronomy and the marine sciences coming in," he said. "Eventually that will help shore us up so we are not so dependent on tourism and the military."

The state labor force topped 650,000 in August, with 632,200 employed and 18,200 without jobs. In August, the state returned to a familiar place, once again posting the lowest unemployment rate in the nation: 2.8 percent, down from 3 percent in July. Nationwide unemployment was at 4.7 percent.

Although companies across the state are in need of workers, the situation is particularly acute on the western side of the Big Island. The Sunday, Oct. 1, edition of West Hawaii Today included five pages of job vacancies, from landscape maintenance and golf cart attendants to hotel executives, nurses and construction project managers. Some ads listed signing bonuses of up to $1,000.

The availability of jobs on the island sparked the private nonprofit development board to create Kamaaina Come Home, a program designed to entice "kamaaina," or locals, to return to Hawaii Island, the largest of the state's seven populated islands.

Many of the state's young professionals historically have had to leave the islands to pursue careers, but that is changing as the high-tech, bio-tech and niche industries are growing across the islands.

For example, McGuffie said, a new agriculture research facility in Hilo is expected to create 200 jobs, including 30 positions for scientists with Ph.D. degrees.

Now, McGuffie said, his job is making former residents aware of opportunities at home, specifically by conducting job fairs up and down the West Coast.

"The program shows quite a bit of promise," he said.

One advantage is that former residents often have an existing support system of family or friends, including a place to live where they can avoid rising rents, as well as a familiarity with Hawaii, its lifestyle and culture.

Job fairs with the Hawaii Island and Maui economic development boards and state Labor Department were scheduled for Oct. 13 in Las Vegas and Oct. 15 in Torrance. Spring job fairs are slated for San Jose, Portland, Ore., and Seattle.

Jon Sakurai-Horita, president of Kamaaina Careers, said targeting former Hawaii residents is a logical step for some companies.

"People have tried their best to get workers who are living there already," he said. "It's difficult to find employees because of housing and salaries."

Mainland recruiting used to be done only at the executive level, but that's changing, but that's changing.

Sakurai-Horita said he is busy planning several Hawaii-theme events on the West Coast. "There is a big group of kamaaina who do want to come back," he said.

The Big Island can tap that market, he said.

"We have the lowest unemployment rate on this island ever. It's at 3.3 percent, but realistically it's about 5 percent in Hilo and down at 2 percent in Kona," McGuffie said. "And a large chunk of that are unemployable for one reason or another. Right now, we have a civilian labor force of between 84,000 and 85,000, the largest ever."

Typically, McGuffie said, Hawaii has 28,000 jobs that need to filled each year. High school graduates total about 15,000 each year, with more than 3,000 leaving the islands to pursue college or employment.

"We've got an average job gap of 16,000 and that alone means we need to attract people back or find new ones," McGuffie said.

Along the Kohala and Kona coasts, hotels and resorts still account for a huge number of jobs, and right now they have a huge number of vacancies.

Although the exact number is not tracked, economists and tourism experts say it likely is hovering around 1,000 openings.

"Recruitment is always a challenge" said Kurt Matsumoto, general manager of the Mauna Lani Bay Hotel & Bungalows. "We just have to get creative."

Hotels typically are in a constant state of recruitment, Matsumoto said, and there is a need in every area, from housekeeping to food and beverage. Salaries range from minimum wage plus gratuities to about $15 an hour.

While the Mauna Lani employs about 600, Matsumoto declined to say exactly how many jobs currently are vacant.

Many of the available workers who would be waiting on vacationers have picked up hammers to build houses for new arrivals.

ON THE NET

- Hawaii Island Economic Development Board: www.hiedb.org
- Maui Economic Development Board: www.medb.org
- Kamaaina Careers: www.kamaaina-careers.com

CHAMP: SIMI VALLEY RACER

Local driver boosted his competitors

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

band competitions. A veteran driver who raced at Saugus Speedway and Irwindale Speedway for decades, Crow said he wanted to spend more time with his family and less time at the race track.

When he blew a motor in practice before one of the races in April, it was no big deal. He would have time to fix it and bring it out again another weekend.

But it rained. The night's races were washed out. Crow said he got lucky. He would have to miss a race, but it wouldn't cost him in the standings.

"At that point, there was no way to stop," said Crow, a driver from Simi Valley who won the Pure Stock track championship at Irwindale Speedway. "I made a deal with my family. If I stayed in the top five, I'd keep racing."

He never finished worse than third in 14 races and won the championship by 90 points.

Jeff Elder, a driver from Redlands, was one of only two drivers to beat Crow all year in the NASCAR Pure Stock division at Irwindale Speedway.

In one of the last races, Elder came in third, but he heard his wife from the stands yell, "It's like you finished second!"

Crow had won again, his 10th of the year. He would add another by the end of the year, finish with 11, and win the Pure Stock track championship in commanding fashion.

"Coming in third feels like you accomplished something," Elder said.

Crow won 11 of 14 races in the Pure Stock division, including nine in a row to end the season. The Pure Stock division races on the half-mile oval and figure 8s. Neither mattered to Crow; he won on both: eight on the oval and three figure 8s.

"He outclassed us," said Harry Michaelian, who finished second in points in the Pure Stock division. "As a competitor, he's the most experienced of us all. It's hard for the rest of us to keep up."

There is also a rule in the Pure Stock division that puts the winner of a race in the rear to start the next race. Crow had to do that eight times in the past nine races — and won every time.

"Racing against Rick, that guy's a stud," Elder said.

Crow had a pretty dominating year in the Pure Stock class. But it's not like he didn't try to improve the caliber of the drivers he raced against. He went out of his way to improve the drivers and their cars.

Michaelian, a champion driver from the Orange Show in San Bernardino, said Crow was especially helpful in the figure 8 races.

Michaelian, a Cal State Northridge graduate who lives in Lawndale, said he never had to set up his car, a 1973 Road Runner, to turn right. He always raced on ovals and all he knew how to do was set up his car to race in circles.

"He came to me," said Michaelian. "He was very sincere as far as his help to me."

Taking time to help other drivers was something Crow learned early in his racing career.

"When I started racing, there was always guys who would share with you," Crow said. "The incentive for trying to help was to get them more competitive."

At one point in the season, Crow said he tried to trade cars with any driver. He especially wanted to drive Elder's 1976 Chevy Nova. But no one was willing to switch and Crow raced his same pink 1972 Chevelle all season.

One of the writers at the track named Crow's car the Pink Panther this year and the name stuck. But Crow has driven pink race cars since 1989, the year his mother died of breast cancer.

Pink was his mother's favorite color. After his mother died, Crow decided to paint his race car pink in memory of her. Crow later discovered that pink is also the color for breast cancer awareness.

He kept the color and said he gets a great response at the track, especially from fans who have beaten breast cancer or have friends who are fighting breast cancer.

Crow has owned this particular car for only two years. He plans on returning for another season of racing in it in 2007, but this past year is one Crow won't soon forget.

"This is the kind of season you dream about in any division," Crow said. "The things I'm most proud of: The guys in that division got better every week, and knowing that I won every one of my main events from last place made it rewarding. It's a great rule. I had a blast."

timothy.haddock@dailynews.com
(818) 713-3715

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